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Poor old Jim

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"POOR OLD JIM"

A SKETCH

In One Act

BY

WILLIAM C. DE MILLE

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“POOR OLD JIM”

CHARACTERS.

JIM

MARIE..... *His wife*

PAUL..... *The Doctor*

SCENE:—*Sitting room in JIM's house—New York City.*

TIME:—*The Present.*

HAND PROPS.

Telegraph pad.

Pitcher of water and glass.

Medicine bag.

Evening coat.

Vest.

Hat.

Shoes.

1105797



“POOR OLD JIM”

SCENE:—Sitting room in JIM's house. A comfortable well furnished room. Door up c. Door L. 1st. Set on Jog at an angle. Table and 2 chairs R. Large clock up L. Other furniture to dress stage as desired. Telegraph pad on table—Jar paste in table drawer—Pitcher of water and glass on table.

AT RISE:—The room is in disorder; hands of clock point to 6.55. Shades are down, electric lights on full. JIM is lying asleep in a fantastic attitude on the couch. He is dressed in evening trousers, shirt, collar and tie. His coat has been thrown on a chair. His vest on another. Shoes on the table, and hat on the floor. JIM's head is where his feet ought to be, and he tosses uneasily muttering from time to time. As the curtain goes up he murmurs, "I'll fight ol' pal— This is on me— What a club for if a man can't treat his frien's." MARIE enters & dressed in a pretty negligee. She looks at JIM—makes a gesture of "what's the use" and pulls up the shade. It is broad daylight outside— She crosses to JIM and shakes him by the shoulder.

MARIE. Jim! Jim!! You're drunk again after your promises to me.

JIM. Who are you?

MARIE. Don't you know me Jim?

POOR OLD JIM.

JIM. Never saw you before in my life—(*still half asleep*) I'm a married man. Go way. Don' allow women in club.

MARIE. (*in back of couch*) Jim—come—wake up. I've sent for the Doctor——

JIM. (*singing in his sleep and waving his leg in the air*) With a stein on the table—an' a good so-ong——

MARIE. Jim—put your leg down. (*she tries to hold his leg quiet—he gets it loose and waves it again*)

JIM. Wha's the matter? Good ol' leg—leggo——

(PAUL enters c. carrying his medicine case— He is a big, good natured chap.)

PAUL. Hello, what's all this?

MARIE. (*coming down to edge of couch*) Oh, Doctor, see what I married!

PAUL. (*examining JIM*) H'm—another evening at the club, eh? (*crossing R. C. to table, he puts powder from medicine case in glass, and adds water through the next few speeches*)

MARIE. Yes—this is what he calls staying on the Water Wagon.

PAUL. The road through the club is pretty rough for water wagons. Too bad that Jim loves the club so— Can't you get him to resign?

MARIE. (*crossing c.*) Oh, I've tried! I've tried! He's such a fine fellow when he's himself Doctor; and it's at the club he gets like this. But I can't stand it much longer. (*bus. PAUL trying to interrupt*) If he loves the club better than he does me—he'll have to choose between us, that's all. (*crosses down L. C.*)

PAUL. (*coming to her*) Now, now, don't let's get excited. Here, give him this medicine while I hold his head— It'll bring him round——

(MARIE takes glass from Doctor and crosses in front of couch, Doctor in back of couch. They raise

him to a sitting position and make him drink the medicine the Doctor has prepared.)

JIM. (*as they raise him up*) No—no more—I'm on the water wag'n—I promised m' wife not another drink to-night—

MARIE. Did you hear that?

PAUL. Well, you see, he remembers his promise—
(MARIE *sniffs*—PAUL *takes glass from her and speaks to JIM*) Come on, just one more.

JIM. No— Can't be done— When a man makes promise to his wife, promise's sacred—(*bus. hic-cough*) Don't tempt me—t' break sacred work of honor, gave to dear li'l woman.

MARIE. Well, upon my word! (*crossing to R.*)

PAUL. It's all right old man— Just one little one. Here take it—(*puts glass to his lips*)

JIM. 'F course, 'f you *force* me—can't help it, can I? (*chuckles*) 'S good idea— Get good drink and keep sacred word 'f honor too—(MARIE *sits in chair L. of table*—JIM *drinks the medicine*) Huh! I knew I'd had enough—it doesn't taste the same 'tall. Guess I'll take li'l nap. (*he lies down again*)

PAUL. He'll be all right in a minute now. (*crosses to C.*)

MARIE. Doctor, there must be some way we can prevent this— If it goes on he'll lose his position and his health— Oh, you'd think he'd be careful when it means so much to me!

PAUL. (*at table with MARIE*) Yes—I told him last time that a few more *sprees* like this would kill him—but it didn't seem to frighten him. We've got to *make* him believe it, that's all!

MARIE. (*turning to PAUL*) But how?

PAUL. (*walking up and down*) That's the question—how?

MARIE. He won't believe you until he's drunk himself to death—and then it will be too late—

PAUL. By Jove that's an idea—

MARIE. What?

PAUL. He's drunk himself to death—(*crossing round L. of table*)

MARIE. (*rising and starting for JIM*) Oh, Doctor!

PAUL. (*stopping her*) No—no—not yet!

MARIE. Then what—

PAUL. (*thinking*) Don't you remember telling me about that play you and Jim saw together—

MARIE. Play—

PAUL. The one that made such an impression on him— You know—where the man dies and his ghost comes back and no one can see or hear him!

MARIE. I remember, but what's that got to do with—

PAUL. Does Jim still think about it?

MARIE. Yes, we were speaking of it yesterday.

PAUL. Good! Then we can do it—

MARIE. Do what?

PAUL. We've got to make him think he's dead; that he's drunk himself to death. That'll give him a scare he'll remember.

MARIE. But how on earth—

PAUL. All you've got to do is to follow my lead and do as I say. Now let's see— He died this morning and his dead body is in the study there—(*pointing to door L. 1*) I'll lock the door—(*PAUL starts L.—MARIE coming down toward him to stop him*)

MARIE. No—

PAUL. Now you put the room to rights—(*PAUL locks door and pockets key*) Hurry up, he'll wake in a minute—(*he sees telegraph blanks on table*) Hello, these telegraph blanks will help! Sit down and write a telegram. Say—

MARIE. (*crossing R. and sitting at table*) Doctor I don't like to do this— It seems so cruel—

PAUL. (*L. of MARIE*) My dear girl—it's the only way to save him— You must have the nerve to carry it through. Come, brace up—after all it's for him—

MARIE. (*taking pencil from table*) All right, what shall I say?

PAUL. (*down c.*) Address it to your Mother— (*MARIE writes*) Say— “Come at once, Jim passed away this morning.” (*looking at JIM*) And that’s no lie——

MARIE. But it will frighten Mother so——

PAUL. She’ll never see it— Where’s the paste? (*coming to back of table*)

MARIE. (*taking paste out of drawer in table*) Here——

PAUL. Good— Now write another just like it——

MARIE. Another!

PAUL. Yes—hurry up—(*PAUL takes message and pastes it to top of table*)

MARIE. What are you doing?

PAUL. (*while pasting it*) Pasting this to the blotter— Ghosts can’t pick things up— When he reads this he’ll know he’s dead. Turn the clock back two hours—(*she does so*) Now remember, whatever happens you must pretend not to see or hear him, he’s a ghost.

MARIE. But when he finds out we’ve been fooling him——

PAUL. He won’t find out— Leave it to me—(*JIM groans and mutters. Bus. gesture from MARIE starting to speak—PAUL whispers*) I’ll tell you the rest outside— He’s waking——

(*They take all the clothes, medicine case, pitcher, glasses, etc., and exit c. JIM slowly wakes up—business, stretching, dark brown taste, etc. He sits up on couch, looks at clock— Feels for watch, bus. running hand down trouser leg. Sees he has no vest or coat—misses his clothes— Starts to look for them—cannot think what he has done with them. Hears MARIE coming and retires up stage as MARIE enters with black hat trimmed with flowers, and some black ribbon in*

her hand. JIM says— “Hello” but MARIE pretends not to see or hear him. She sits R. of table and begins to untrim hat. JIM nerves himself up and comes down to her— Through the next scene neither MARIE nor PAUL seem to see or hear him.)

JIM. (*apologetically, trying to smile genially*) Marie—my dear—I’m afraid I was out rather late and I thought I wouldn’t disturb you, so I took a nap on the sofa. (*MARIE uses her handkerchief to wipe away an imaginary tear*) No, no, you’re wrong. It wasn’t that way at all. (*MARIE looks through him with a mournful expression*) You mean what did I do with my clothes? (*MARIE returns to fixing hat*) Well, that’s rather a long story—but I suppose I’ll have to confess. You know what a tender heart I have and as I was coming home from the club—it was about three O’—minutes past twelve, and a poor fellow stopped me on the street. Oh, it was pitiful, Marie. He had no coat or vest, or—shoes, not even a hat, and he told me about his poor little children; all starving you know—what could I do? You’d have done the same, I’m sure. I—I had no money with me, so I gave him—what clothes I could spare—and of course my watch was in the vest—and—well—he seemed to need it so much more than I did—and—(*MARIE uses handkerchief. He dries up*) Why, what are you crying about? Is anything wrong—(*sees telegram—bus. trying to sneak it away—cannot get it and comes round to L. of table*) Hello, what’s this? (*he tries to pick it up—it won’t come. He conceals the fact that he cannot pick it up and sits in chair L. of table to read it*) You’re wiring your Mother? (*reading*) “Come at once—Jim passed” what’s this? “Jim passed away this morning.” Why—what Jim? We don’t know any Jim—(*she does not look at him, but continues with hat*) My dear I wish you’d answer me! Of course I may have my faults

but I think I'm entitled to an answer— What Jim has “passed away” and caused you to cry? (*sharply*) Marie! (*she looks through him again, shaking her head sorrowfully*) Don't act like that; it—it makes me feel so queer—(*she puts ribbon bow on hat*) Oh, very well, if you want to be mad—be mad, I can't help it—(*rises and crosses down L. When PAUL enters C. and comes down to MARIE—JIM sees him*) Hello Paul—what are you doing here so early—anyone sick?

(PAUL *doesn't see JIM's outstretched hand.*)

PAUL. (*gently*) Marie——

MARIE. Oh—Doctor—(*rises and crosses to PAUL R. C.*)

PAUL. (*patting her shoulder and putting her in chair L. of table*) There, there—you must try to be brave; I did everything I could to save him——

MARIE. I know you did Doctor, but Oh—I was so fond of Jim!

JIM. Look here, I demand to know—who is this Jim?

PAUL. (*in back of table*) Yes—Poor Old Jim——

JIM. Say—I'm trying to be patient, but you two are getting on my nerves you know—if you won't——

PAUL. (*continuing*) I warned him that he'd drink himself to death—and now he's done it. (*crossing L. in front of couch*)

MARIE. Yes—Poor—poor Jim——

JIM. (*crossing C.*) Don't keep it all to yourselves—I'll cry about him if you want me to—but I've got to know who he was, haven't I?

PAUL. Marie—where have you put—the body?

JIM. (*turning to PAUL*) What's that?

MARIE. (*point to L. 1*) In the study there. (*choking back tears*) He—he was so fond of that room.

(PAUL *nods sympathetically.*)

JIM. Oh, he was, was he? (*savagely—coming toward MARIE*) Now see here—I've got some rights in this house—even if I do stay out late once in a while—and I insist on knowing all about this—*Who's* so fond of my study that you put his dead body in there while I'm away? (*MARIE business with handkerchief—PAUL standing sorrowfully, silent*) All right, don't answer if you don't want to; I'll see for myself. (*he goes over and tries to open door L. 1*) Who locked this door?

MARIE. (*to PAUL*) Go in if you like Doctor—The door's not locked——

JIM. (*shaking the door*) It's not, eh?

PAUL. No—I'd rather remember him as I knew him—Poor Old Jim—(*crossing L. C. to MARIE*)

JIM. Say, this poor Old Jim stuff is worn out—Now just forget it——

PAUL. He loved you, Marie——

JIM. (*crossing in front of table to R.*) Well, what the— How in— What's the matter with me, anyhow? Can't people see me? Am I invisible? Can't you hear me?

MARIE. Yes— He always told me that he loved me——

JIM. Oh, don't mind me—go right on—(*sitting in chair R.*)

MARIE. And he was a good husband to me——

JIM. What!! (*bus.*) Husband!

PAUL. Yes—he was—Poor Old Jim——

(*JIM starts to speak but can find no words.*)

MARIE. Except when he'd been drinking——

JIM. Why they talk as if I—were——

MARIE. You know, doctor—I can't seem to realize that he's dead—(*JIM starts*) I seem to feel as if he were here now—in this very room with us——

(*JIM rises and crosses L.*)

PAUL. (*solemnly*) Who knows— Perhaps the Spirit of the dead *do* come back—(*going around R. of table and sits in chair*)

MARIE. Yes, just as the man did in the play——

(PAUL *sighs deeply.*)

JIM. (*in front of couch*) The play! The dead man's ghost came back! (*looking at and feeling himself*) Oh, my Lord! That telegram—(*going over*) Jim passed away this morning— The—the body is in there— They can't see me—or hear me— I can't pick up a telegram, or open a door— I—I'm dead—I'm the Jim that died—I'm Poor Old Jim!! (*sinks on settee*)

MARIE. (*to PAUL*) Will you send this wire to Mother when you go out? I'd like to have her here, now that I'm all alone.

PAUL. (*bus. with pencil and paper*) Yes, and I'll write a notice for the papers.

MARIE. (*rises and goes up c. and puts hat on chair at door*) Oh, if he'd only kept his word and given up drink, he'd be alive to-day——

PAUL. I warned him, Marie——

JIM. That's right—you did and I thought it was just to scare me. But I can't be dead—I don't *feel* dead—I only feel about half dead—(*slaps himself gently in the face. Bus. rises*) Oh! I'm sure I felt that—Marie—Paul—I'm not dead—(*starting toward them*)

PAUL. (*to MARIE*) What time do you expect the undertaker——

(JIM *stops.*)

MARIE. (*coming down c.*) Right after breakfast——

JIM. (*c.*) No—I won't have them—I don't like them— Oh, if I could only see my dead body—it'd

make it easier to believe—(*starts to door L. 1, then back to them*) Oh, haven't you got the decency to go in and look at me—once in a while? I—I'm lonely two go and look at me—open the door, Marie—in there—(*going over to them*) Marie—I—*will you*

MARIE. Doctor, did you hear anything?

PAUL. (*rises*) No——

MARIE. I seemed to hear my name——

JIM. That's right—good girl——

PAUL. It's your imagination——

JIM. (*to PAUL*) Oh, keep out of this—won't you?

(*PAUL goes up L. to back of table.*)

MARIE. I suppose you're right——

JIM. Oh, very well—*don't* open the door— If i'm any kind of a ghost I can walk right through it— Here goes—(*he tries to swagger through the door— without success; he gives it up*) I suppose I've got to learn how to do these things—Here, Paul—(*he crosses to him in back of table*) Come and open this door— Come on—(*he takes PAUL's arm and tries to pull him across the room, but cannot move him*)

PAUL. That's funny— Now *I* seem to feel a presence here—I feel as if something were urging me to go over there?

JIM. Sure, come on——

PAUL. You know we're apt to feel this way for a few days, but then Jim's spirit will move on——

JIM. (*backing away*) Move on!

PAUL. Into the great unknown——

JIM. (*giving it up*) Oh! I don't want to move on— You won't turn me out—Marie, just because I'm dead! (*crossing L. C.*)

PAUL. And what will *you* do, Marie?

MARIE. I don't know—Jim didn't leave me anything—(*JIM goes back to couch and sits*) Oh, why didn't he save money instead of spending it all at the club?

PAUL. (*coming around R. of MARIE*) Marie—I love you—(*bus. MARIE looking at Doctor and he winking—"it is all right"*) I love you, Marie—

(*Bus. JIM—then slowly rising and coming toward them during next scene.*)

MARIE. Oh, Doctor, not yet— It's too soon!

PAUL. I have loved you ever since I met you. All that kept me silent was my friendship for Poor Old Jim.

JIM. Oh, stop calling me "Poor Old Jim."

MARIE. (*rises and comes in front of table—PAUL close to her*) Why, I never suspected—

PAUL. Of course not—but now there's no reason why I shouldn't speak—

JIM. No reason! How about me? Haven't you any respect for your friend's memory?

PAUL. Couldn't you learn to care for me, Marie? (*he puts his arm around her—Bus. both bracing themselves against table*)

JIM. (*seizing the arm and trying to take it away*) Here, take your hands off my wife—

MARIE. Of course Paul, I can't give you my first love.

PAUL. I promise you, Marie—I won't leave you alone while I go to the club—(*bus. JIM letting go PAUL'S arm—and then falling back a little—JIM crosses L.*) No—we'll have such nice cozy evenings together—

JIM. (*crossing c.*) Oh, no, you won't—I'm only a little baby ghost now—just a few hours old—but you wait, you wait till I learn how to haunt you—I'll break up some of those "cozy evenings."

MARIE. Oh, that's what Jim used to say—but he loved the club better than he did me.

JIM. I didn't, Marie, I didn't— It was just—just—

PAUL. Ah, Poor Old Jim—

JIM. (*going up stage c.*) Oh, shut up.

PAUL. He wasn't bad—only weak——

JIM. (*coming down to back of table—PAUL L MARIE R.*) Oh—if I could be alive again for one minute.

PAUL. But you'll find it different with me.

JIM. You bet it'll be different. I'll sit on your pillow every night and give you dreams that——

MARIE. Yes, I do trust you Paul—but it's too soon. (*crossing to L. c.*)

JIM. You bet it's too soon; haven't you got any shame—to be making love here—(*almost tearfully*) while my dead body is lying neglected and forgotten in that room.

PAUL. (*coming toward MARIE*) I think that if Jim were here, he'd be the first to tell you to accept my love.

JIM. Marie, you won't let him put *that* over on you?

MARIE. If I could only ask him— Perhaps a spirit medium could get him to rap on the table——

JIM. That's a great idea, Marie— Listen—(*raps on table loudly*)

MARIE. Hush—listen——

PAUL. What is it?

MARIE. Didn't you hear anything?

(JIM *bangs on table.*)

PAUL. Not a sound.

(JIM *bangs again.*)

MARIE. It seemed to me that I heard a faint tap-tap on the table.

(JIM *almost breaks the table.*)

PAUL. By Jove, I *do* seem to hear something——

JIM. (*R. of table*) Ha—if I can get it through your head, I'm some ghost.

MARIE. (*crosses to L. of table, PAUL in back of table*) Hush—it's Jim trying to talk to me. I know it——

PAUL. Wait—we'll ask. Jim, are you here?

JIM. (*yelling*) Yes—I'm here. Can't you hear me?

PAUL. (*looking at MARIE*) Not a sound.

MARIE. Jim, if you're here, rap on the table. (*JIM bangs. To PAUL*) There it is. (*looking at table. Bus. with fingers; looks up*) If you can hear me, rap once for "yes" and twice for "no." Do you understand? (*JIM raps once*) There, he says yes. Do you want me to marry Paul?

JIM. (*raps twice*) No.

MARIE. He says no.

PAUL. What do you want her to do then?

JIM. That's none of your business. You keep out of it.

PAUL. He is silent. (*crossing L. c.*)

JIM. You darned fool, how can I rap yes or no to a question like that?

MARIE. (*to JIM*) Jim, would you rather speak to me alone? (*JIM raps twice*) He says no!

JIM. No, I didn't. I said "yes," "yes." (*bangs once*) There.

MARIE. No. He says yes.

PAUL. Explain to dear old Jim that we will always remember him with deep affection—good-bye dear, for a little while. (*he kisses her in spite of JIM's efforts to prevent it and exits U. c.—JIM sits in chair L. of table*)

MARIE. (*c.*) Jim, if you could live again, would you give up the club and stay at home with me more?

JIM. Yes, I would. (*raps once*) If only to fool the Doctor.

MARIE. Thank you, Jim. Of course, it's too late now—and I'll have to marry Paul—(*JIM bangs table*)

no—no—no) I'm forced to, Jim—(*bus.*) I can't starve—(*bus.*) but I'll always remember that you reformed before you'd been dead two hours.

JIM. Yes, it's so easy to reform when you're dead.

(PAUL has come down on tip-toe, behind JIM who doesn't see him—His coat is off and he carries a handkerchief in his hand. He seizes him from behind, claps the handkerchief over his nose and mouth. He quiets down almost immediately. *Bus.* MARIE rushing to JIM's side frightened.)

PAUL. It's only a whiff of chloroform, Marie, it won't hurt him a bit. Quick, fix the clock and unlock that door. (*takes key from his pocket and hands to her. She turns clock forward two hours and opens door to study; PAUL gets his medicine case and puts it on the table, turns blotter on table over and taking second telegram out of his pocket puts it on table*) Here's a telegram he can pick up. (JIM begins to mutter) He's all right, he's coming round now. (MARIE goes in back of table, PAUL L. of JIM and starts to manipulate his heart. As JIM opens his eyes PAUL says) At last, Marie, he has come back to life. I have performed a miracle. The heart-massage did it.

MARIE. Oh, Jim—Jim—(JIM sits up weakly—*bus.*) Oh, Jim, don't you know me? (JIM raps once on table) What are you doing that for?

JIM. What that—(*raps*) Oh, nothing, nothing—(*sees telegram. Slowly picks it up—is relieved when he can lift it*) Why—I can lift it, can't I?

WARN CURTAIN.

MARIE. Of course, why not?

JIM. Oh, nothing—it seems so queer to pick up a telegram, that's all.

PAUL. (L. c.) You've had a narrow escape, Jim. You've been dead for more than two hours. (JIM looks at the clock) And if I hadn't thought of the new method of heart-massage, you'd have stayed dead.

(JIM rises and goes toward PAUL C.—MARIE comes down R., crosses in front of table.)

JIM. Yes, and you tried to take advantage of a dead man, didn't you? Making love to my wife and talking about "Poor Old Jim." And you think you'll have lots more chances when I'm at the club, don't you? Well, you won't, because I've given up the club, and I'm going to save money, so that the next time I die, you can't force your love on my wife, just because she's hungry—no—(opening his arms) Marie—(she crosses c. to him) I've come back from the grave to protect you. (he holds her in his arms and looks defiance at the Doctor)

CURTAIN.

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